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Littoral

Robie Liscomb

Independent scholar/poet

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Littoral

1

at Sitchanalth/Willows
worlds meet

*grounded in the everyday
yet archaic and
continuous
with the future*

blue Olympic ridge
white fog bank
and stalking heron
blend into each other

the sun is dreaming
the ocean is dreaming the
biologists are dipping nets and
dancing into waves that
hiss and seep into sand
as wisps of steam drift
across the tideflats

the ancient heron
rises into graceful
flight

2

watering plants this morning on the back patio
the cry of a crow a few trees away
we share this life, this paradise

mutually implicated
unfolding proteins with
shared instructions entangled genes
and wildly braided histories

having lived inland for years
I was suddenly flooded by deep
connection I never knew I'd lost
hearing the squawk of Gloucester gulls

as Olson slurs his words
on the N.E.T. audiotape
'USA: Poetry' March 12th 1966

do gulls do crows live generation
after generation in the same place
I ask Kathy this morning at Willows

what have their ancestors heard
and what will be the living song
of these places we love

now we and all our
relations in impermanence
are being impelled through this
sixth great extinction

3

the ocean is rising
the great ocean is
angry we are not
its perfect child

who is this we
who lives in this
snarl of relations
trying to change it more than just
perfecting our own lives and
like it or not we find ourselves
recruited in this battle
for the biosphere

damaged and embedded in
economies of property
with no choice that is not
prescribed just
broken hearts and
minds and selves
forming and whole
only with and for and
perhaps *as* each other
creatures
among creatures

phytoplankton limpets
herring salmon orcas
bleaching coral, squid in
vast plastic gyres
and galaxies of
melting sea stars

4

another morning Kathy and I are at Willows
and we barely hear—almost hallucinate—
faint singing far across the water

out by Tod Rock and Fiddle Reef first one then
three more Lekwungen canoes are moving west-to-east
the lead boat largest with about a dozen paddlers

their song grows louder and it's coming from
more than 400 years ago—from before contact—
and is still the sound of this place

5

this Earth is paradise and owns itself
it is the beloved with and for whom
we have all become each other's
dreams and necessary conditions

it is always unfinished
this business we speak of
this morning with the waves
lapping at our feet

and what does not come in on this
particular tide
but on shores not necessarily other

tender foreign bodies
beached face-down in the sand
drowned island nations and
sea birds smothered in crude

6

dancing on the shores of many oceans
at the threshold of what will be and
what will not

*sockeye smolts glisten
in waving eelgrass,
the call of a new orca calf*

*fracked gas petrodollars
in Petronas pockets,
collapsing Chinook runs
and the deafening din of
bitumen tankers*

between living waters
and dead zones of
aqua nullius

waging kinship

Note on the Text

Sitchanalth is the name of the ancient Songhees First Nation settlement that once ran along the shoreline of Oak Bay, British Columbia, and centered on Willows Beach and Cattle Point. There is archaeological evidence that it goes back at least 2,600 years. In the Lekwungen language, it refers to the many drift logs that lodge there in the sand.

Olson is poet Charles Olson, whose magisterial work *The Maximus Poems* is rooted in his city of Gloucester, Massachusetts, where I grew up.

Aqua nullius is a term created in relation to the concept of *terra nullius* (empty land), which denotes the belief of European colonists that the land was empty, rather than occupied by “civilized” peoples, and thus free for the taking. *Aqua nullius* extends this concept to the idea of the empty ocean as a dumping ground and place open to other human misuses leading to the destruction of living systems.

ROBIE LISCOMB is an oldish white guy living with his life companion and their ailments in the territory of the WSÁNEĆ people. He is the author of *Words and Food* (Fathom Press, 1981).